Posters: CUTE Baby Animals! ★ Free Stickers and a Comic

November/December 2014

American Girl

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3 funny quizzes

* How to find the perfect **present**
* **Pretty** paper crafts

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Volume 22, Number 6

Contents

Follow Your Inner Star®

Girls Express 2

Contest 8
Sweet Stockings

Speak Up! 10
Sleepovers

According to Aggie .. 12
Light Bright

Gift Decoder 14

We Can Change the World 20

Happy New Year! 24

Quiz 26
Fashion Forecast

Craft 28
Festive Flair

The Secret Santa 32

This or That? 40

Mini Mag 41

Posters 43

Help! 45

Behind the Scenes .. 48

Plus AG's New Year Cheer Stickers

Safety first!
Some of our projects and activities require an adult's help.
When you see this symbol, be sure to ask an adult to work with you.

Cover photo: Steven Talley

Girls EXPRESS®

Oh, Snow!

Make sweet snowpeople to give as gifts.

1. Wrap a granola or candy bar in plain white paper. Secure with tape.
2. Use markers to draw a snow face.
3. Add a felt hat and scarf.

Meet an AG Reader

Jade W.

Age 11, Washington

In my free time, I like to do sports, make art, and play with my fluffy hamsters—Tummbles and Smokey.

A time I laughed so hard I could hardly breathe: I was reading a book, and my dad ran up, jumped on me, and starting tickling!

A time I wanted to disappear: That was the time my teacher called on me to give an answer in class and I had absolutely NO idea what the answer was.

My proudest day: I got up in front of my whole school to run for the elected position of historian. I was proud because I really don't like being up in front of a crowd.

In 20 years, I'll be making art for museums.

My favorite part of AG is the true stories about girls' lives. It's interesting to read about other people.

Introduce Yourself!

To find out how to be a featured reader, go to americangirl.com/playmagazine

Photo: Radlund Photography Illustrations: Tracey Wood

Take This Quizzz...

Which sleeping bag pattern matches your personality?

1. Which movie do you like best?

a.

b.

c.

2. Which breakfast?

a.

b.

c.

3. Which pajamas?

a.

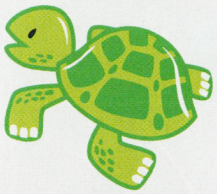
b.

c.

4. Which stuffed animal?

a.

b.

c. 

5. Which activity?

a.

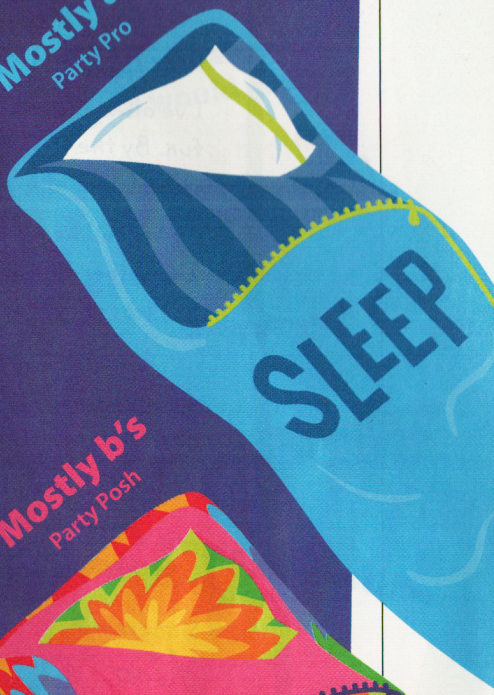
b.

c.

Mini Quiz

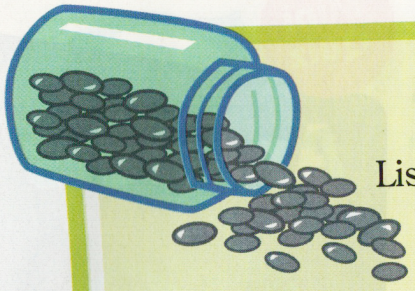
Answers

Mostly a's
Party Pro



Mostly b's
Party Posh

Mostly c's
Party Peace



True Story

Lisa bought a fixer-upper car with her own money—and then it was stolen!

Dear American Girl,

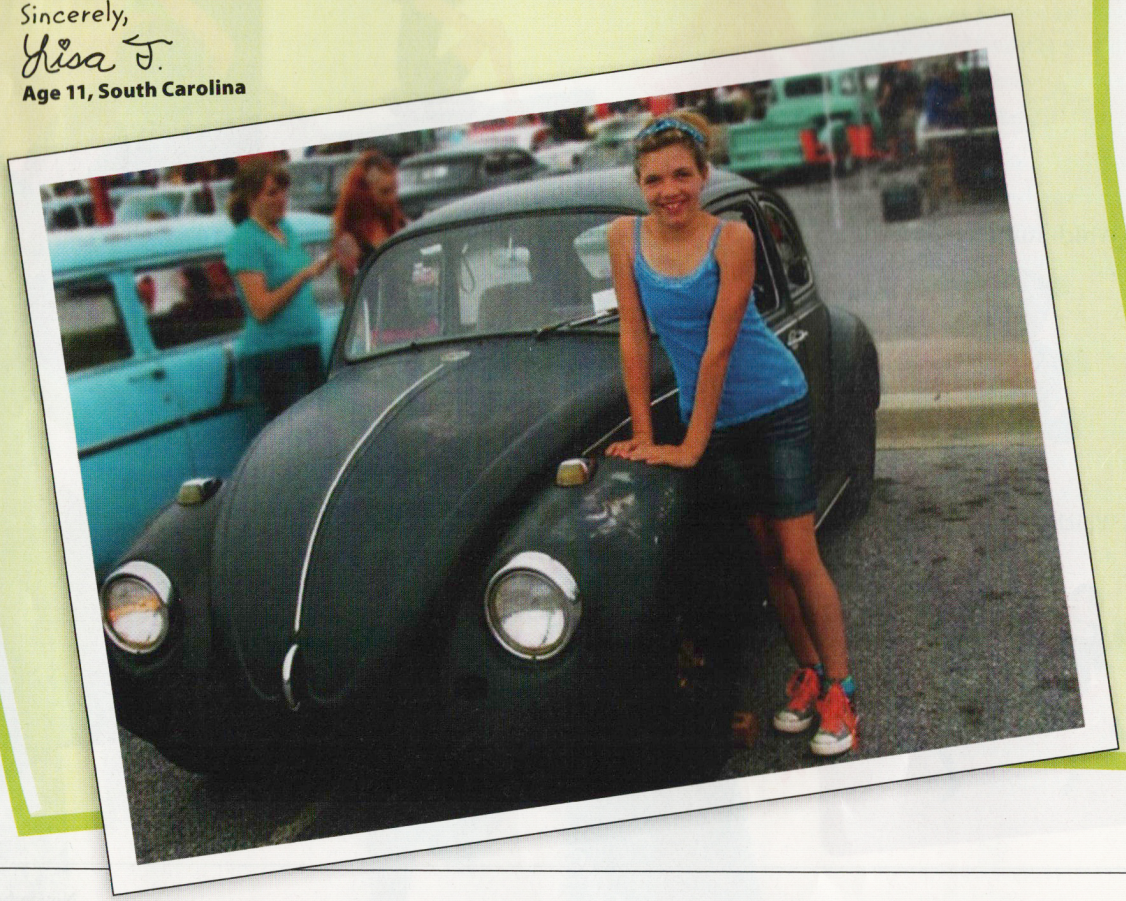
I've always loved cars, especially old ones. My family and I restore them for fun. By the time I was eight, I wanted my own car so bad. I saved up money by taking care of my neighbor's pets and working at my grandpa's scrap yard.

When I heard about a 1967 Beetle for sale, I went to see it. I was nervous about spending the money, but I fell in love with that little car. I named the car "Lucy." She was so cute and just the right size for me. We brought her home that day.

A month later, someone stole Lucy! I cried forever when I found out. But lots of people helped look for her. The police found the car six days later. I didn't care that she had lost her headlights and her shiny golden rims. I was so happy to have Lucy back, I felt like crying all over.

I've made new friends thanks to Lucy. People donated parts to fix her up. I still have years before I can drive her. But that's OK. For now, I let Grandpa take the wheel.

Sincerely,
Lisa S.
Age 11, South Carolina

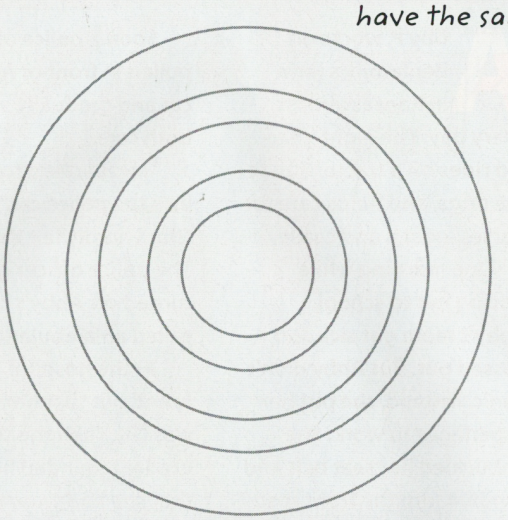


Doodle Decor

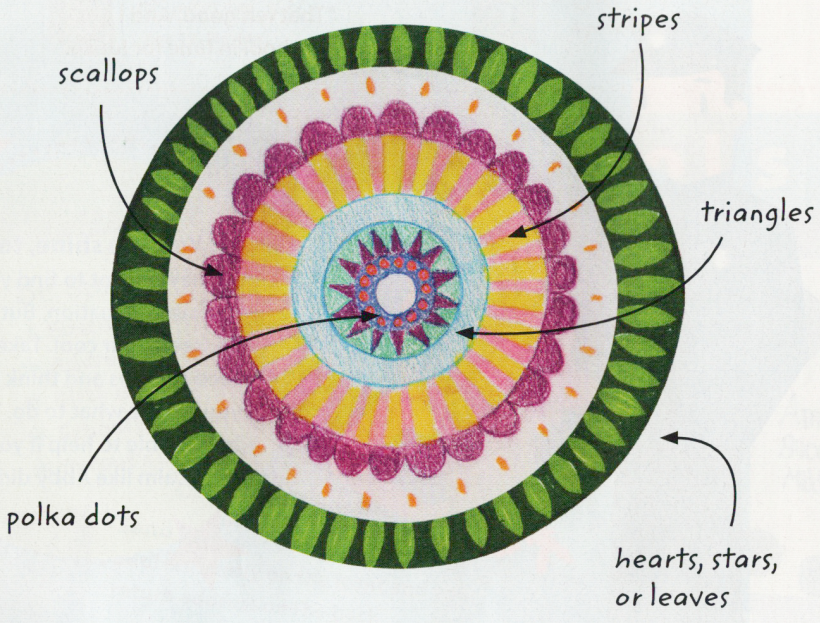
Use these cute designs to decorate gifts, tags, cards, or even school supplies!

Draw a circle with four *concentric* circles inside.

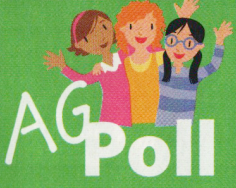
It means all the circles have the same center.



Add a pattern to each layer.



Shade or color in some sections after the pattern is finished. Pretty!



Answer these questions, and then turn the page to see how your answers compare with those of other AG readers.

At a sports event, where would you be?

* Cheering in the stands
* Out on the field or court
* Selling snacks
* Coaching younger kids

How would you describe your bedroom?

* Colorful
* Cozy
* Artistic
* Stylish

What do you do on a gloomy day?

* Cuddle up with a book
* Feel sleepy
* Work on a craft
* Bake a treat

AG Poll

What girls told us

At a sports event, you'd be

53% out on the field or court.

29% cheering in the stands.

11% coaching younger kids.

7% selling snacks.

Your bedroom is

42% cozy.

24% colorful.

21% stylish.

13% artistic.

On a gloomy day, you'd

45% cuddle up with a book.

22% work on a craft.

19% feel sleepy.

14% bake a treat.

To answer our weekly poll question, go to americangirl.com/playmagazine

Shining Star

Abby P. works on her family's farm in Kansas almost every day. The eight-year-old rides on a tractor, feeds the dogs, and helps care for horses, goats, and cattle.

One morning while driving her to school, Abby's mom got sick and passed out. But Abby didn't panic. Instead, she put her experience to work. She unbuckled her seat belt and climbed into the front seat. She steadied the steering wheel like she had learned on the tractor.

Soon a police officer pulled in front of Abby's car and gradually stopped both cars.

"I was scared to bump into the police car," she says. "But I hardly felt the bump." The police officer got out, turned off Abby's car, and called an ambulance.

At the hospital, Abby found out that her mom was OK. Then the second-grader reminded her dad that she had to get to school.

"People told me I saved my mom's life," Abby says. "That felt good. And I got to school in time for lunch."

You can shine, too.

You never want to find yourself in a scary situation. But if you do, keep your cool. Take some deep breaths and think before you decide what to do. You're better able to help if you stay calm like Abby did.

AG Art Gallery

Look—AG covers imagined by girls like you!

Help us fill our gallery! Send color copies of your **original artwork** or **photos** to the address on page 7. Sorry, we can't return entries.

Kelsea M.
Age 12, Florida

Skyler S.
Age 12, Florida

Lena P.
Age 12, Texas

Write to Us

Be sure to include your

- **First and last name**
- **Address and phone number**
- **Birth date, including year**
- **School photo or other portrait**
- **Parent's signature**

Send us a cool envelope! Print our address neatly on the **front** and your return address on the **back**.

We can't print every letter, but we read everything you send to us. Hope to hear from you soon! ★

Envelope art by
Audrey P.
Age 11, Michigan

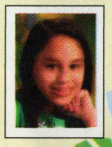
Contest

Sweet Stockings

You knocked our socks off with these cute holiday stockings!

Tropical Treats

Gabriella G.
Age 10, Virginia



Candy Cutie

Kayleen N.
Age 9, California

Merry & Bright

Alyssa C.
Age 11, Illinois

Dreidel Dreams

Becca F.
Age 12, Virginia

Jolly Jewels

Madison P.
Age 10, California

Nice Ice

Maddie Q.
Age 11, Colorado

Santa Paws

Hailey A.
Age 11, Massachusetts

New Contest: Rainbow Fashion

Calling all designers! Create one-of-a-kind outfits in bright rainbow colors and style, head to toe. To send us your original rainbow-themed outfits, follow the instructions on page 7. Postmark deadline: December 10, 2014. Winners will appear in the May/June 2015 issue. Sorry—we can't return entries.

Illustrations: Lauren Scheuer

Sleepovers

Your favorite snacks are

#1 Popcorn

#2 (tie) Chips

#2 (tie) Candy

#4 Pizza

Where do you sleep?

42% In a sleeping bag

33% In a bed

25% On the floor with a blanket and pillow

Number of sleepovers you have each month: 1

The activities you like best:

Watching movies

Playing Truth or Dare

Playing board games or cards

Talking all night

When do you fall asleep?

A little late 19%

REALLY late 60%

So late that it's the next morning! 21%

Number of girls at a typical sleepover: 2

2 out of 3 girls

bring stuffed animals!

Illustrations: Paige Pooler

Coming Up: Gadgets

1. Which of these do you have?
   a. Cell phone b. Tablet
   c. E-reader d. Laptop

2. About how many texts do you send in a normal day?
   a. None
   b. Just a few
   c. At least 50
   d. At least 100
   e. At least 200 or more

3. Do you have to share your passwords with your parents?
   Yes **OR** No

4. What's your ringtone like?

5. Your favorite emoji is ...
   a. smiley. b. frowny.
   c. winky. d. laugh-y.
   Describe it!

6. Do you have any of these school rules: No gadgets allowed ...
   a. during class time?
   b. to be turned on at school?
   c. outside of lockers or bags?
   d. in school at all?

7. Have you ever been in trouble with a parent or friend because of a gadget? Describe.

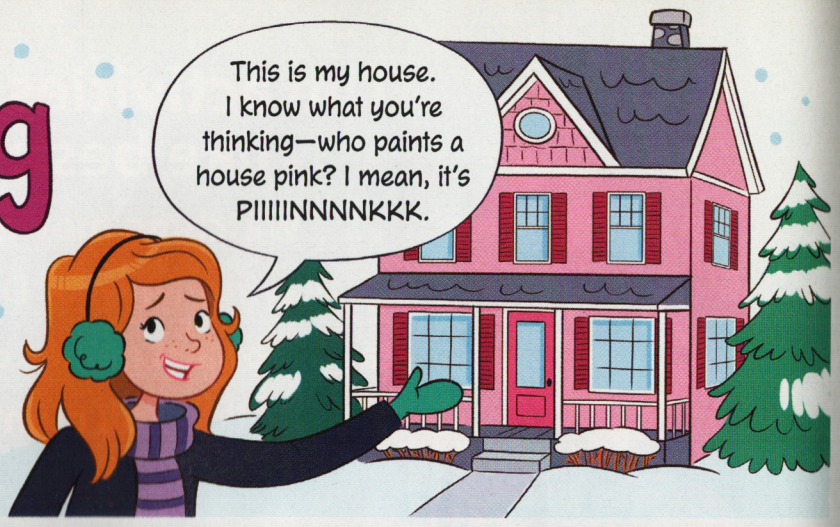
8. If you could invent an app, what would you want it to do?

Send your answers to the address on page 7, along with your first and last name, address, school or portrait-style photo, and birth date. Postmark deadline: December 12, 2014. Some answers will appear in the May/June 2015 issue. ★

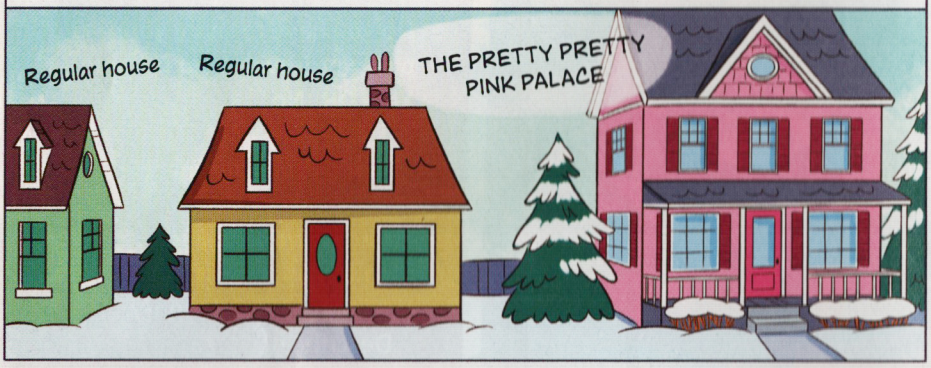
According to Aggie™

Light Bright

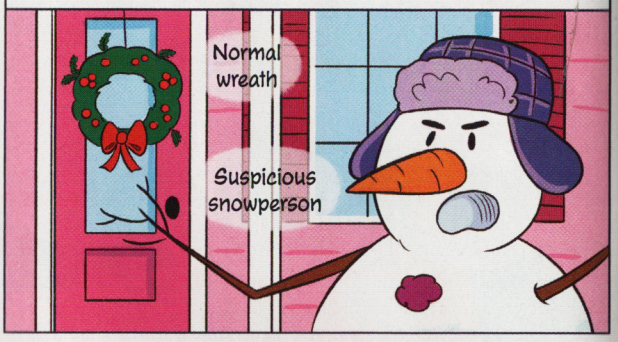
Illustrated by Genevieve Kote



It has always stood out in a totally embarrassing way. It was pink when we moved in a few years ago. And we haven't gotten around to painting it.

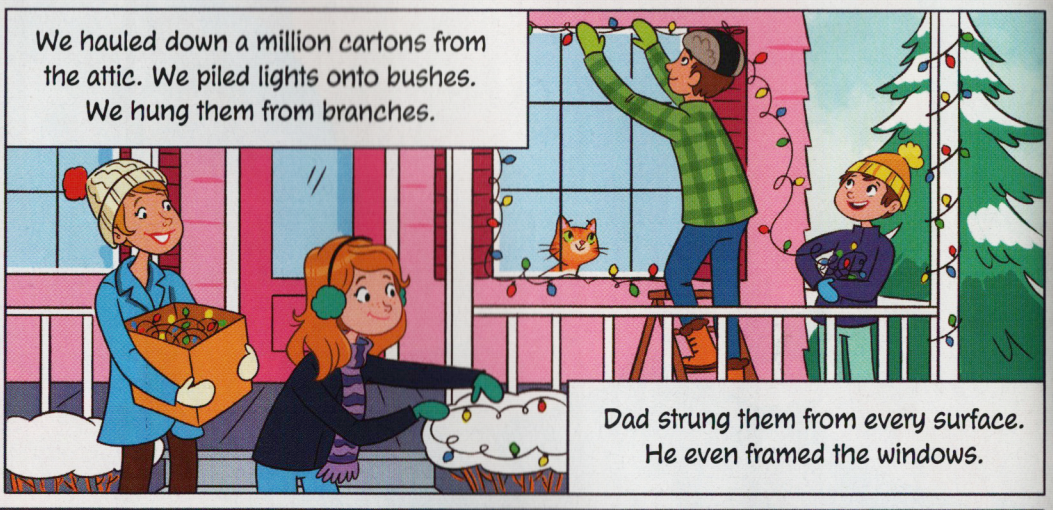


Anyways, Dad always says it's the perfect house for Christmas lights, even though we've only ever put up a wreath and a weird snowman.



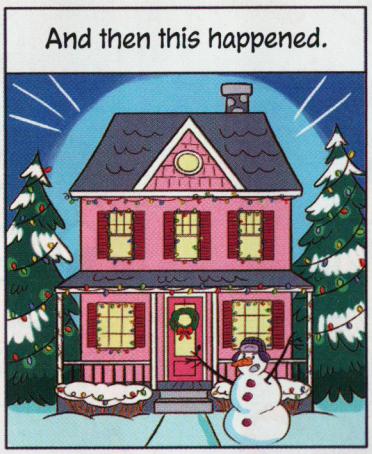
But Dad said that this year, we were going all out. Literally, *all out.*

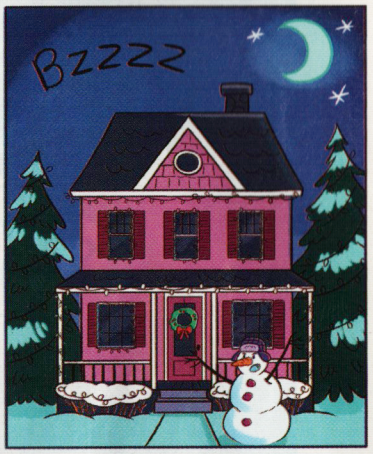
We hauled down a million cartons from the attic. We piled lights onto bushes. We hung them from branches.

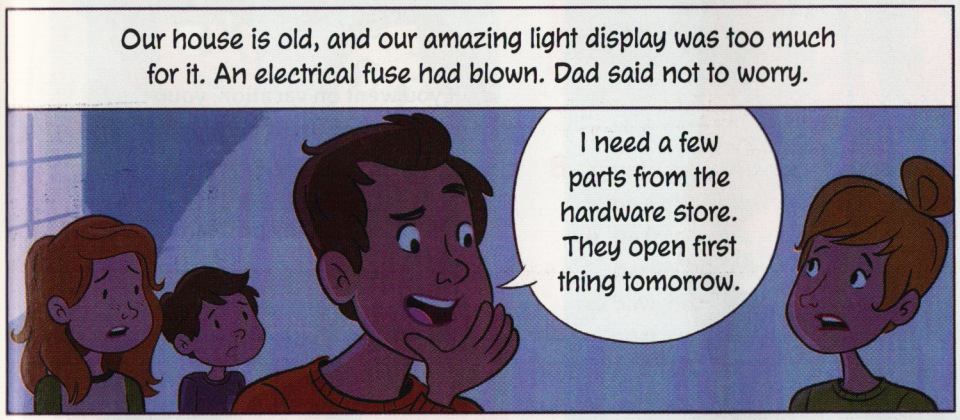


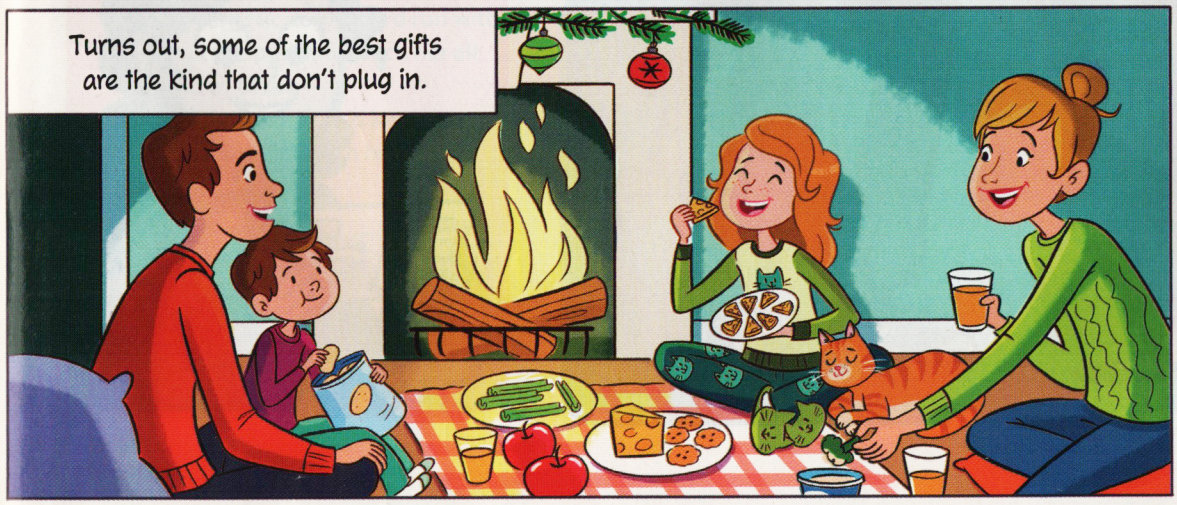
Dad strung them from every surface. He even framed the windows.

It looked AMAZING.

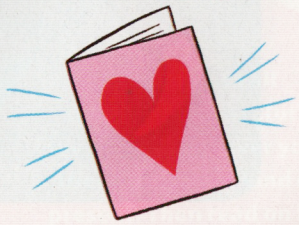








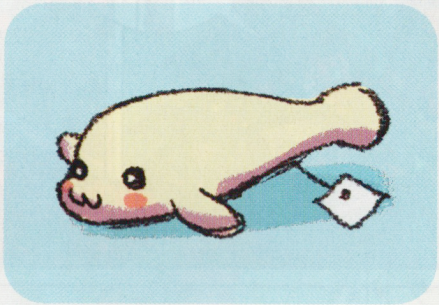
Don't miss my next misadventure:
HEART SMARTS



Gift Decoder

Gift giving got you stumped? Take this quiz to pick the perfect present for a friend.

1. Your friend's prized possession would be
- **a.** her bracelet collection.
- **b.** a souvenir from a fun vacation.
- **c.** a special note from a family member.



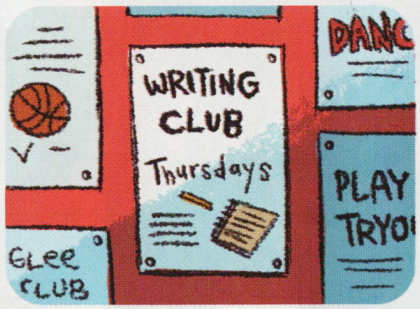
2. If you went on vacation, your friend would like it best if you
- **a.** brought her back a T-shirt.
- **b.** invited her along.
- **c.** sent her a funny postcard.

3. Your friend's ideal birthday probably would have a lot of
- **a.** gifts.
- **b.** guests.
- **c.** birthday texts.

4. Your friend would never forget
- **a.** a special gift from you.
- **b.** a fun experience you shared.
- **c.** a nice compliment you gave her.

5. Your friend's dream pet would be
- **a.** a sweet hamster—she'd build him the ultimate hamster house and research the best treats.
- **b.** an energetic dog—she'd run with her at the park and teach her all kinds of tricks.
- **c.** a talking bird—she'd love a pet who could chat with her.

6. If your friend joined a club, it would probably be
- **a.** Craft Club.
- **b.** Adventure Club.
- **c.** Writing Club.



7. A holiday activity your friend would like is
- **a.** making cookies to share.
- **b.** collecting donations for charity with friends.
- **c.** singing or performing in a show.

8. Your friend's favorite T-shirt would
- **a.** be a gift from someone else.
- **b.** be from a fun run she participated in.
- **c.** have her favorite saying on it.

9. When you need cheering up, your friend might
- **a.** make you a gift.
- **b.** invite you to do something fun together.
- **c.** write you a kind note.

Gifts come in all shapes and sizes. Turn the page to discover your friend's favorite kind of present. Then read on for great gift ideas!

Illustrations: Vera Brosgol

Answers

Mostly a's: Gifts to Hold

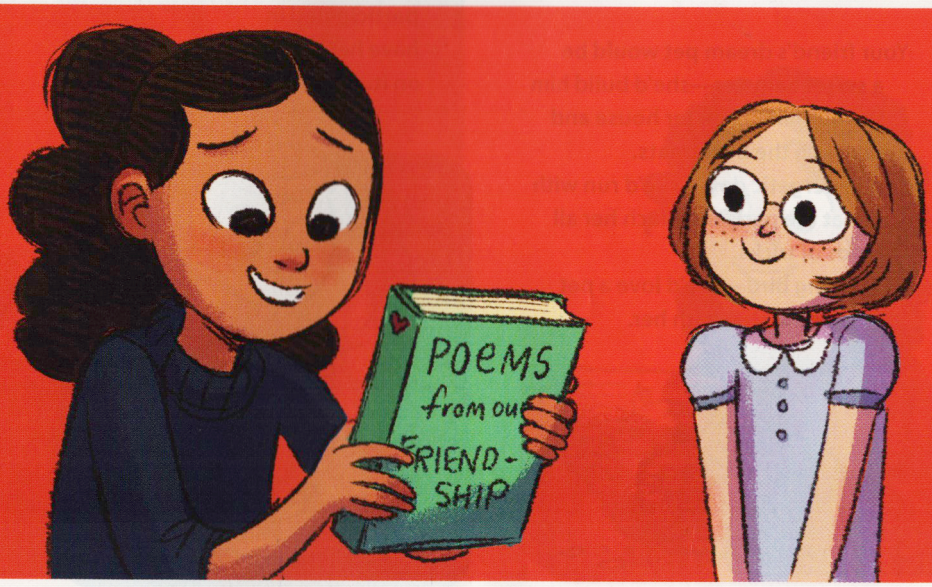
Break out the gift wrap! Your friend loves gifts that come in a box—whether they're store-bought or homemade. A thoughtful present shows her that you care (even a little thing can mean a lot).

Mostly b's: Gifts to Experience

Your friend's favorite gifts are experiences she can share with you. Instead of giving a wrapped gift, plan a special activity to do together. Make a gift certificate with a description of the gift and deliver it in a decorated envelope.

Mostly c's: Gifts to Read

Words mean a lot to your friend whether it's a compliment, an inspiring quote, or a meaningful note. Give your friend the gift of words. She'll probably remember them more than any other gift.



Gifts to Hold

Winter Warmers

Warm a friend's heart and hands. First, cut and stack two 4-by-4-inch felt squares. Use a sewing needle and thread to stitch around three sides (make sure the stitches are close together). Continue sewing halfway along the fourth side. Ask an adult to help you fill the pouch with ¼ cup uncooked white rice. Sew the pouch closed, and decorate with adhesive-backed felt stickers.

Give these directions with your gift:

Ask an adult to help you heat the hand warmers in a microwave for 20 seconds. Place two warmers in your pockets to keep your hands toasty on the way to school.

Colorful Carrier

Decorate a bag to stash art supplies or other gear. Start with a plain canvas tote bag (available at craft stores). Lay the tote bag flat on a covered work surface, and place a piece of cardboard inside. Use masking tape to create a pattern or shapes on one side of the bag. Fill in the shapes using a foam brush and nontoxic acrylic craft paint. Let dry. Remove the tape to reveal your one-of-a-kind design!

Sweet Treats

Give a tasty gift! First wash your hands and cover your work surface with wax paper. Ask an adult to help you melt 1 cup of candy melts in a microwave. Dip a pretzel rod in the melted candy until half of it is covered. Set the pretzel on the wax paper and sprinkle with crushed candy, coconut, or crushed cookies. Continue dipping pretzel rods until you're out of melted candy. Let harden. Put some pretzel rods in a plastic bag and tie with a ribbon.

Gifts to Experience

Cookie Cupcakes

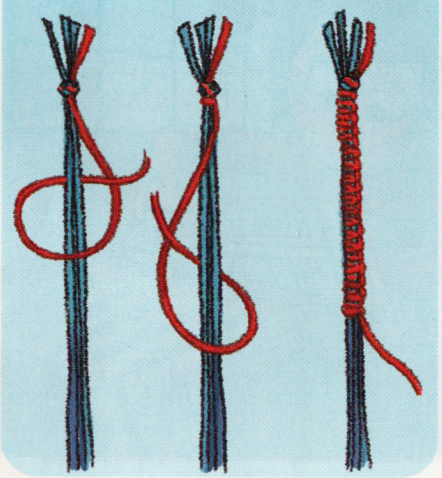
Team up in the kitchen and bake yourselves a treat. Beforehand, give your friend a list of options where she chooses the cake flavor, frosting, and toppings. Ask an adult to help you gather up all the ingredients and invite your friend over. When the cupcakes are done, make sure she takes some home!

Instructions

1. Start with a 15.25-oz. box of cake mix. Follow the directions on the back to make one batch of cake batter.
2. Line a cupcake pan with fancy paper liners and place a chocolate sandwich cookie in each one. Fill each liner about two-thirds full. (The cookies may float to the top.)
3. Ask an adult to bake the cupcakes at 350 degrees for 15-20 minutes. Let cool. Then frost and decorate!

Bracelet Bonanza

Make bracelets together! Start with three 24-inch pieces of yarn and one 60-inch piece of yarn in another color. Fold the yarn in half and tie a knot to make a ½-inch loop. Secure the end and follow the diagrams below.



Lights, Camera, Action!

Invite your friend to a themed movie night at your house. Start with your friend's favorite movie; then choose a food and activity that go with it. For example, you could dress up like characters from the movie and eat a snack those characters would eat. (Ask a parent to help you brainstorm if you're stumped.)

Gifts to Read

Poem Poster

Write a poem for your friend. For each letter of her name, choose an adjective that describes her. Display the poem on a piece of posterboard.

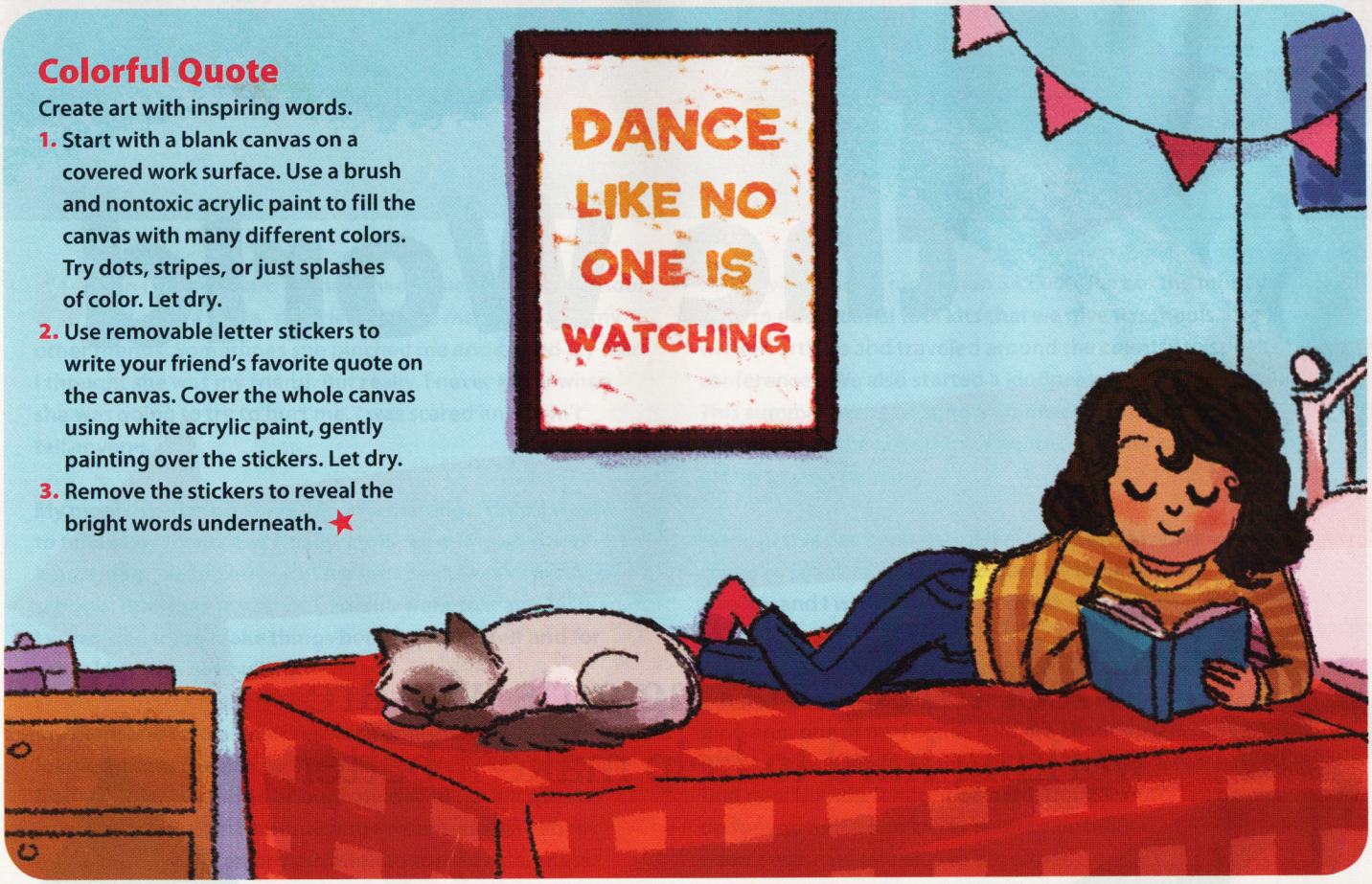
Me-and-You Memories

Make a list of all the things you like about your friend or fun memories you've shared together. Write the list inside a decorated card. Whenever your friend needs a pick-me-up, she'll know where to look!

Colorful Quote

Create art with inspiring words.

1. Start with a blank canvas on a covered work surface. Use a brush and nontoxic acrylic paint to fill the canvas with many different colors. Try dots, stripes, or just splashes of color. Let dry.
2. Use removable letter stickers to write your friend's favorite quote on the canvas. Cover the whole canvas using white acrylic paint, gently painting over the stickers. Let dry.
3. Remove the stickers to reveal the bright words underneath. ★



We Can Change the World

Meet three amazing girls who are working hard to help make it better.

Morgan, age 11

Helps Stop Bullying

Hanging a poster as part of an awareness project

Receiving an award for volunteering

When I started third grade, I made a new friend at school. But after a while, she tried to keep me away from my other friends. Sometimes she pinched me and pulled my hair. I thought she was my friend. But really, I never knew when she was going to try to hurt me. I was scared and didn't tell anyone.

My mom asked me if something was wrong. I didn't want to tell on my friend, but finally, I told my mom what was happening. We talked about it a lot. I could have switched schools. But I love my school. I didn't want to leave. Instead, I wanted to try to make things better—for myself and for other kids who get bullied.

My mom and I did a lot of research and shared what we learned about the dangers of bullying. We talked to school leaders. Then we raised enough money to have a speaker come in and give an anti-bullying presentation. Then my mom and I started an organization to spread awareness.

So far we've raised more than $42,000. Part of the money goes to educational tool kits that we give to schools. I've written articles and traveled around the country to speak at conferences. We also started a kindness council in our town. This summer, we're hosting a kindness camp. We're even working with the governor of Kentucky to create a statewide group to stop bullying.

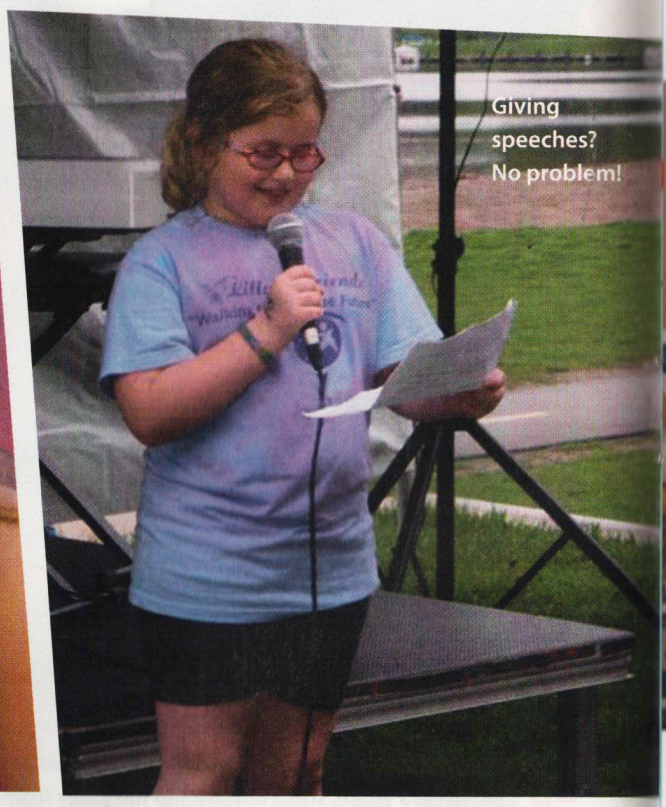
None of this has been easy. Like, I get very nervous when I have to speak in public. But I just try to get courage. I have a voice, and I want to use it for good.

These days, things have been much better for me at school. But bullying still happens to millions of kids every year. Not long ago, one of my friends told me about others making fun of her. I suggested that she talk to a parent or a teacher and find new friends. It might be hard, but it's important to stand up for yourself. I don't ever want to be bullied again, and I don't want anyone else to be, either.

Lilly, age 12

Helps Fight a *Disease*

My sister, Abby



Giving speeches? No problem!

I was born with a rare disease that might cause me to go deaf and blind one day. My glasses and my hearing aids help, but they won't fix the problem (the condition is called Usher syndrome).

Five years ago, I found out about an organization that has an annual walkathon to raise money for research to help cure conditions like mine. I thought, *I can help!* It's not like I'm a doctor, but I can raise money and spread awareness. I can't think of anyone who'd like to go deaf, blind, or both—including me.

I wrote to everyone I knew and talked to my classmates about forming a walkathon team. My parents helped me set up a website. I made fliers and asked local businesses to put out donation jars. It can be hard to get people to give money. But when they do, it makes me happy and it helps a lot of people. So far we've raised $78,000. It's very exciting to raise so much money and make a big difference for the cause.

Three years ago, I took on the role of youth chairperson for our walkathon. It's an important job. I cut the ribbon to start the walk and gave speeches. I'm not afraid to tell my story—I've been speaking in public since I was in second grade. My mom says I'm a good chairperson because I'm always smiling. Usually, I'm smiling because so many of my friends and family and people in our community come out to support my work.

Even my little sister, Abby, helps. She started her own walkathon team (with their own T-shirts) three years ago. It makes me really happy that she helps so much. It also makes me want to hug her because she's so awesome.

Maya, age 14

Helps Save the Planet

In my studio

I love the earth!

Do you ever stop and think about this big, beautiful world we live in? It's home to so many people, places, and ideas. We all live in this amazing place, so we all should take care of it, too.

A long time ago, I started thinking about what I could do to help take care of the planet. I wondered how I could use my talents for good. I love creating websites and making art and designing clothes. That's what inspired me, at age 8, to start an online company that sells fun, environmentally safe accessories and clothes. I donate part of my profits to organizations trying to save our environment.

After I launched my business, I started getting invited to give presentations to young people about my company and the environment. I also talk about the other things I'm into, such as making cartoons and animated films about the environment and girls' rights.

One thing I've learned is that a lot of people feel like a small contribution to any cause is just a drop in the bucket and won't make a difference. But that's not true! When it comes to saving our environment, every small action makes an impact, including turning off a light, shutting off the water while you're brushing your teeth, or recycling a can—even saving a single bee.

One time, a bee flew into the room while I was making a presentation at a school. It was funny, because at that moment I was talking about the importance of pollination. When the kids saw the bee, they were freaking out. I was like, "Bees are OK! They are so important to our environment."

So that's what I mean about small actions—such as saving one little bee or simply using your voice. You can increase awareness about saving the environment just by talking. The way I look at it, the little things make a huge difference. ★

Happy New Year!

Try these New Year's Eve ideas at a party with family or a sleepover with friends!

Night Lights

Light up the New Year! Give guests glow-in-the-dark bracelets and necklaces to wear (available at party supply stores), and decorate the room with glow-in-the-dark stars. Keep the lights on during the countdown and then turn them all off at midnight.

Party Hats

Party hats go with anything—from pj's to party clothes—so make your own! First, cover a table with a disposable tablecloth, and set out craft supplies such as markers, stickers, googly eyes, and ribbon. (Don't forget scissors and double-stick tape, too.) Then let each guest decorate a paper party hat. Wear the hats until the New Year!

Sparkle Punch

Make a bubbly toast! Pour 3 cups cranberry juice, 2 cups orange juice, and 3 cups ginger ale in a pitcher. Stir gently with a spoon. Add ice cubes and pour into glasses.

Countdown Crunch

Bake this crunchy snack mix before your party begins. In a large bowl, mix together 6 cups rice squares or wheat squares cereal, 3 cups cheese crackers, 2 cups popped popcorn, and 1 cup pretzels. In a separate microwave-safe bowl, melt 4 tablespoons butter (about 30 seconds). Ask an adult to pour the melted butter over the cereal mixture, and stir until the mixture is coated. Then add one 1-oz. package ranch dressing mix and stir again until coated. Once it's cool, store the party mix in a covered container until it's time to serve it.

Around the World

At the top of every hour, shout "Happy New Year!" because it is, somewhere in the world!

Dance-a-thon

Pick partners and turn on some music. Each pair puts a balloon between their foreheads. Everyone dances (you have to keep moving!), keeping the balloon in place with no hands. Partners are out if they drop the balloon. The last team dancing wins.

Balloon Drop

Make this midnight memorable! Before the party, cut a new garbage bag along one side and along the bottom to make a flat piece of plastic. Tie a long string tightly to one corner. Ask an adult to tape three corners of the plastic to the ceiling with masking tape, leaving room for balloons. Ask the adult to tuck in blown-up balloons and tape the final corner to the ceiling. At midnight, pull the string and the balloons will rain down!

Confetti Treats

Dip bite-size treats in fondue. First, stir together ¾ cup chocolate chips and ½ cup nondairy whipped topping in a microwave-safe bowl. Ask an adult to heat the mixture in a microwave for 1 minute, stirring every 20 seconds until melted. (You can also use white chocolate chips for a white chocolate version.) Add ½ cup nondairy whipped topping, and stir until combined. Serve fruit, pretzels, graham crackers, or marshmallows in cupcake liners. Guests can dip the treats in the fondue and shower them with rainbow sprinkles.

Illustrations: Carol Yoshizumi

Fashion Forecast

Discover your winter style as temperatures turn cold.

by Carrie Anton

START When your morning alarm goes off, you

run to the window to check the weather.

What's the weather like outside?

It's a winter wonderland!

What's the best thing about snow?

I've been counting down to today's activity for weeks!

My day is free and clear for having lots of fun of any kind.

a little lazy.

full of energy.

A belly full of a yummy breakfast makes you feel

The smell of Dad's famous waffles.

What finally wakes you?

go back to sleep—you forgot to turn off your alarm for the weekend.

I'm just not sleepy anymore. Time to start the day!

What's special about today?

Bleh. It's another cold, gray day.

Sledding, building forts, skiing, making snowmen...it's too hard to choose!

Watching it fall from the window as I read a book and cuddle under a blanket.

A ponytail and a headband. Nothing special.

How are you wearing your hair today?

Chilling out indoors.

With lots of curls and a fancy braid. It took an hour, but it was worth it!

Where do you plan to spend the day?

It depends on the weather.

Bundled Beauty

Your fashion forecast calls for lots of cold-weather layers so that you stay warm in a winter wonderland. Hats, mittens, neck warmers, thermals, coats, and boots are the gear you need to continue your freezing outdoor fun. Some chilly days are just too cold for some people's comfort, but not you. You say, "*Brr*-ing it!"

Cozy Cute

Your fashion forecast calls for casual comfort perfect for indoor downtime. Pair a fuzzy fleece and colorful leggings with cute socks and silly slippers for an outfit just right for relaxing inside. Watch a holiday movie, help your mom bake a batch of white chocolate brownies, or make some personalized gifts perfect for your pals. No matter what you do, you're dressed for an easy, *brr*-eezy day!

Festive Fancy

Your fashion forecast calls for a dressed-up outfit with winter wow appeal. Go for a glittery top that shimmers like freshly fallen snow and a skirt that pops in bold holiday colors. Whether you're performing in a winter recital or attending a sensational seasonal party, dress your best from head to toe, and you're sure to feel *brr*-illiant. ★

Illustrations: Alyssa Nassner

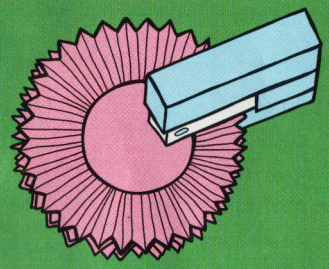
Festive Flair

Use these paper decorations wherever you want holiday cheer—on a tree, a window, a gift, and more!

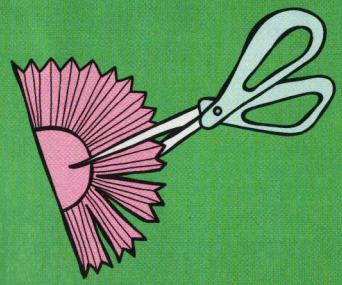
Gift Topper

Dress up a gift with paper ruffles!

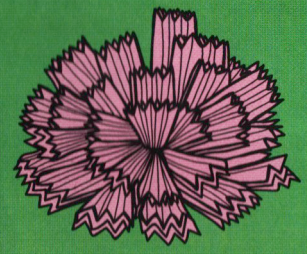
1. Flatten 10 paper cupcake liners, and stack them on top of each other. Staple the stack together in the center.



2. Next, fold the stack in half and use scissors to cut slits all along the curved edge.



3. Unfold the liners and fluff them so that they don't stick together. Attach the topper to a gift using double-stick tape.



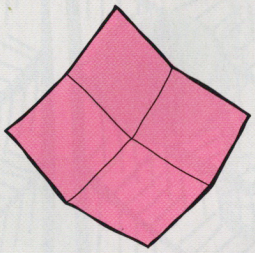
Confetti Tags

Create dotted gift tags from paper. Use a hole punch to cut tiny circles from colorful paper. Then cut a 2-by-3-inch piece of card stock or paper for the gift tag. Use a glue stick to attach the tiny circles to the gift tag. (Be sure to leave space at the top of the tag.) Let dry. Punch a hole near the top of the tag, and thread ribbon through the hole. Don't forget to write "To" and "From"!

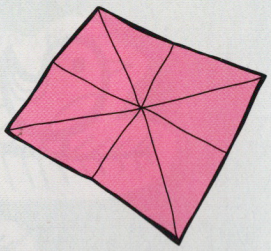
Starry Sight

Brighten a window with holiday stars.

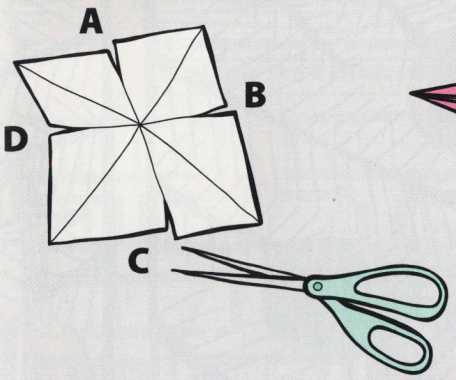
1. Start with a 6-by-6-inch piece of scrapbook paper. Make a crease by folding and unfolding the paper in half horizontally. Create another crease by folding and unfolding the paper in half vertically.



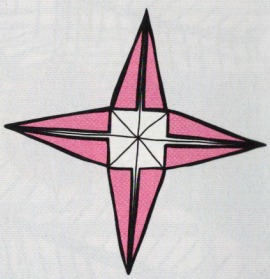
2. Fold and unfold the paper diagonally, and repeat to make a fourth crease. Lay the paper flat.



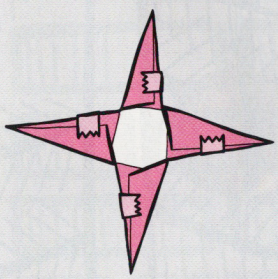
3. Turn the paper pattern-side down. Use scissors to cut a 1¼-inch slit at A, B, C, and D.



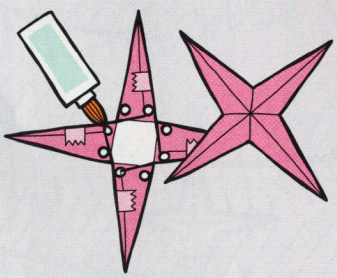
4. Fold in the flaps on both sides of each corner to make 4 points.



5. At each corner, fold one flap over the other and attach with tape or craft glue. Let dry. Make a second star.



6. Use craft glue to join two stars together. Let dry. Ask an adult to use a needle and thread to make a hole at the top of a point. Tie the string to make a loop for hanging.

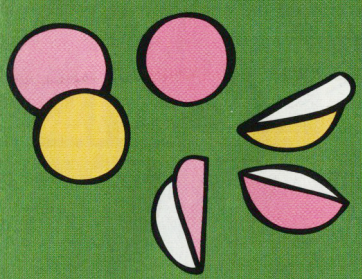


Illustrations: Emily Balsley

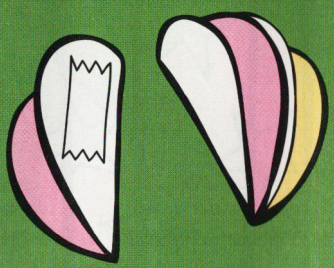
Wee Ornaments

Hang these mini ornaments from a tree, a doorknob, even drawer pulls.

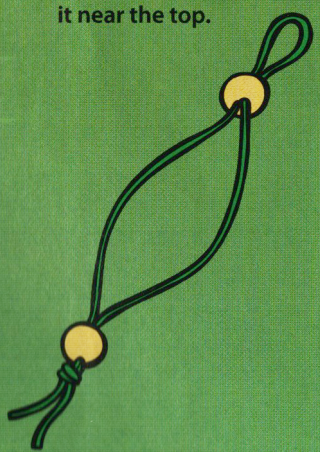
1. Use a circle paper punch (about 1-inch diameter) to cut out 9 circles from scrapbook paper. Fold each circle in half.



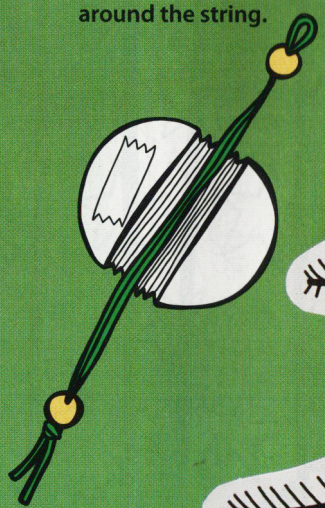
2. Place double-stick tape on the outside of a folded circle. Attach another folded circle to either side as shown. Continue using double-stick tape to attach folded circles to one another until you use up all the circles.



3. Cut a 10-inch piece of string. Tie its ends in a double knot. Thread a bead onto the string and slide it to the knot. Thread a second bead onto the string but keep it near the top.

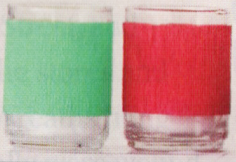


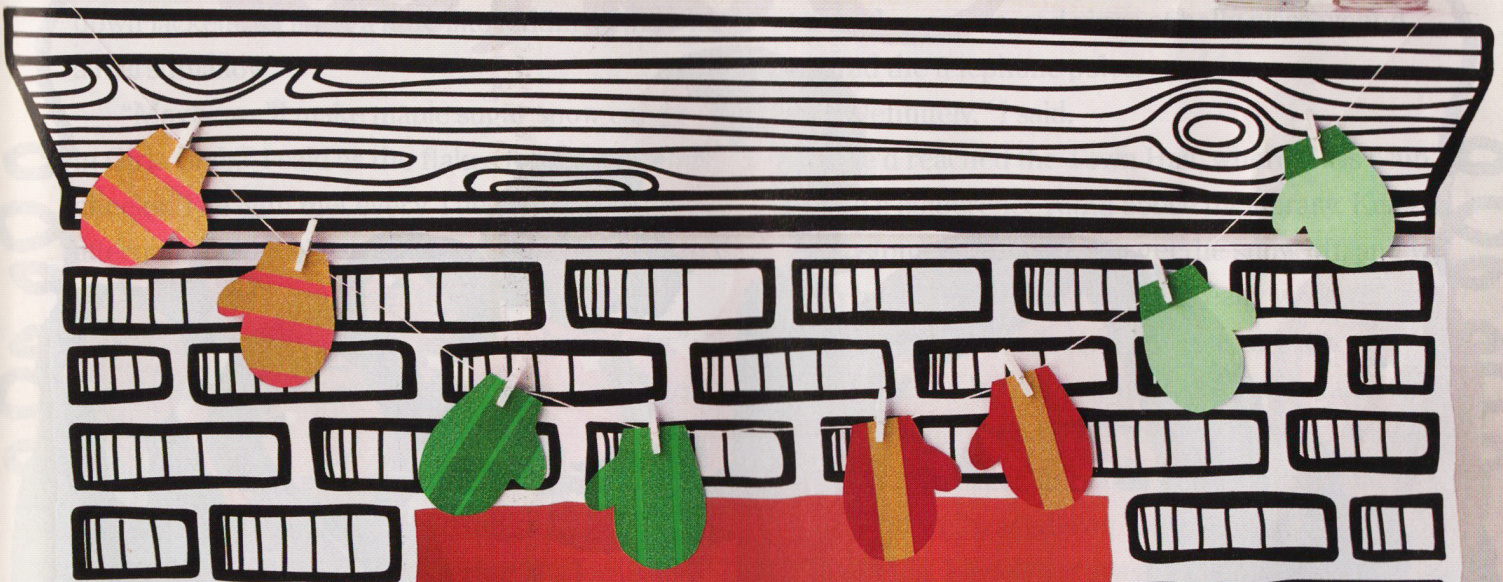
4. Use double-stick tape to close the ornament around the string.



Little Lights

Light up a winter night with colorful lanterns! Start with a small glass votive holder. Cut a piece of paper streamer that's long enough to wrap once around the votive holder (leftover streamers from birthdays work great). Use clear tape to secure the ends of the streamer to each other. (You can try layering colors over each other for stripes. Place a small battery-powered LED light inside. Use the lights at a winter sleepover!





Merry Mittens

Hang some sparkly mittens! First make a template. Draw a large U-shape on a piece of card stock. For the thumb, draw a smaller U-shape alongside the first. Cut out the shape. Trace the template on colored paper to make as many mittens as you'd like. (Flip the template every other time so you'll have left-handed and right-handed mittens.) Decorate the mittens with glitter tape. Use mini clothespins (available at craft stores) to attach the mittens to string. Ask an adult to help you hang the garland. ★

The Secret Santa

How can Caitlin get into the spirit of Christmas for a girl she doesn't even like?

by Daphne Benedis-Grab

"Ready, Caitlin?" my best friend, Keisha, asked. The last bell had rung, and the hall of our middle school was packed with kids in coats and snow boots heading out into the winter afternoon.

"Yeah," I said, slamming my locker shut. I wound the pink and gold scarf I'd knit around my neck as we made our way through the crowd and out into the cold.

"It's snowing again," Keisha said happily, linking her arm with mine. We were both wearing puffy down jackets, so it felt a little like linking arms with a marshmallow.

"Maybe we'll make maple sugar snow candy in Girls Club," I said as the flakes fell softly on my cheeks. The club met every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon, and while we always looked forward to it, today we were extra eager to get there.

"I bet we'll make some after the name draw," Keisha said. "I can't wait to see whose name I get this year."

"Me either," I said. Girls Club had members from all over town, and we did fun stuff like craft and cooking projects, volunteering at a local animal shelter, and just hanging out and talking. We also had special traditions for each holiday, like the haunted house we set up on Halloween and the egg hunt we did at Easter for all the little kids in town. But the very best was the Secret Santa we did at Christmas. That was when we all drew names out of a big Santa hat and then got a special gift that had to be twenty dollars or less, just for that person. You weren't allowed to tell who you picked until we had our big club Christmas party on December 23, which was two weeks away. Everyone at club got really into the Secret Santa, and we all tried to get gifts our pick would love. Like last year my friend Ariana got my name, and she gave me a bunch of yarn and a new set of knitting needles, which was totally perfect for me.

"Want to go gift shopping this weekend?" Keisha asked. We were on Main Street, and Christmas lights twinkled from the stores and restaurants lining the sidewalk. Wreaths hung on the lampposts, and vines of holly were wound around the telephone poles.

"Definitely," I said.

We'd reached the Town Hall, where Girls Club met in a conference room above the library. Keisha and I stomped our boots to get the snow off, and we then headed inside and up the creaky wooden staircase to the second floor. We hung our coats and backpacks on hooks outside and went in. Jade, the college student who leads the club, waved. Ariana and her twin sister, Alexandra, were at the snack table, and we headed over to them.

"Caitlin, I love your sweater," Ariana said, moving to the side so that we could get hot chocolate and graham crackers.

"Thanks," I said, grinning. "I used the yarn you got me."

Ariana laughed. "I thought I recognized that sunny yellow."

"Are you guys excited for the name draw?" Alexandra asked.

I was about to reply when I heard someone else

Illustrations: Galia Bernstein

coming up the steps. I turned, ready to greet the incoming club member. But then I saw who it was: Dana. Everyone at Girls Club was super friendly and nice—everyone, that is, except for Dana. She never talked to any of us and always had a crease between her brows, as if she thought everything we were doing was lame. She snapped at us when we tried to include her and almost made Keisha cry when she refused to even take the invitation to her birthday party over the summer.

I turned back to my friends, wanting to catch up with them and not waste time on Dana.

Jade looked around the circle. "Are we ready?"

Everyone nodded and Jade walked up to Ariana, who drew a name, read it, and smiled. I twisted a loose thread on my shirt as I waited impatiently for my turn. Finally Jade stood in front of me and held out the hat. I reached in, my fingers brushing against the scraps of paper inside. I pulled one out and opened it as Jade moved on to Keisha. I looked down at the paper, and then every bit of excitement and hope I'd felt about Secret Santa drained completely out of me.

I looked down at the paper, and then every bit of excitement and hope I'd felt about Secret Santa drained completely out of me.

"All right, girls, let's get started." Jade stood in the center of the room, Santa hat in hand.

We all hurried over and sat in our usual circle.

"Your pick is a secret," Jade said seriously. "And when you get your name, think about what makes that girl unique. The gift you get should reflect who she is and be something meaningful to her. Because in the end it's not about the gift—it's the thought and care you put into it. That's the real meaning of the Christmas spirit." I never got it when people said that. You put thought into a gift because you wanted the person to like it. So it was about the gift, because who wanted to give someone something she wouldn't like?

Keisha was bubbling as we walked home, planning where we'd go shopping over the weekend and laughing about how Alexandra ate twice as much maple sugar candy as the rest of us. I walked alongside, quiet.

"Caitlin, what's wrong?" Keisha asked finally.

I shook my head. "I can't tell you," I said.

"Is it about your parents?" she asked gently. Last year my parents had gotten divorced, and I couldn't have gotten through it without all the girls in the club calling and texting me, taking me out for ice cream, and making sure I always had someone to talk to. And even though I was dreading our first Christmas split between my parents instead of all together, that wasn't what was eating at me now.

I shook my head.

"You can tell me anything," Keisha said.

I definitely knew that and suddenly, in the icy twilight with the first stars just beginning to shine, I needed Keisha to know how my Secret Santa had been ruined. "I drew Dana's name," I said softly.

Keisha's eyes widened and then filled with sympathy. "Oh, no," she said.

"Yeah," I said with a sigh. "What should I do?"

"We can try to think of something together," Keisha said, sounding as doubtful as I felt. "But honestly I don't think you should have to get something for Dana when she makes it obvious she hates the club and all of us in it. You should ask Jade if you can swap names with her. She's the leader, so she can figure out what to get Dana."

My spirits rose as I thought about what she said. "You're right," I said, squeezing her arm happily. "I'll talk to Jade on Thursday."

I felt a million times better as we headed home.

On Thursday Alexandra brought in Christmas cupcakes that she passed around the circle. "It's a new recipe," she said, sounding excited. Alexandra was really into cooking. She held out the plate to Dana, but Dana just shook her head and wrinkled her nose.

"No, thanks," she sneered, like Alexandra had offered her a plate of worms.

"I'll take two," Keisha said quickly, reaching over and taking another one from the plate.

"They're delicious," I said loudly. "I'm going to want seconds, too."

The girls around me nodded.

Alexandra, who was looking a little tearful, smiled gratefully. And Keisha and I exchanged a look. I had to get out of being stuck with Dana as my pick.

So later, after we'd made Christmas cards and set up plans to visit the animal shelter on Saturday, I approached Jade.

"Can I talk to you alone for a minute?" I asked, feeling a little nervous.

But Jade smiled kindly. "Of course," she said, taking me into the little office off the conference room. "What's up, Caitlin?"

"I drew Dana's name in Secret Santa," I said. "And I really can't think of anything to get her. She's just so unfriendly and—"

I broke off when I saw a hardness settle over Jade's features. "I can't help with that," she said. "That's not how Secret Santa works. You don't just get to choose the people you like best in the group."

"It's not that," I said, wanting to explain.

But Jade held up a hand. "Caitlin, Secret Santa is about the Christmas spirit, showing kindness and compassion to everyone. And sometimes that means stretching out of your comfort zone a little."

"That's not how Secret Santa works. You don't just get to choose the people you like best in the group."

I wasn't exactly sure what she meant by that, but I could see the disappointment in her eyes. I had let Jade down, and that felt awful. So now I really needed to get a great gift for Dana.

But what?

That night I had dinner with my dad. He took us every Thursday night and every other weekend. But often on Thursdays it was just me, because my older sister, Tanya, was in drama club at the high school and always had a meeting or rehearsal.

"Hey, Caitlin," my dad said as I climbed into the steamy warmth of his car after Girls Club. "Where to?"

I still wasn't used to it being just me and my dad like this. Before the divorce we always went out to dinner as a family. But Reesa from Girls Club, whose parents had gotten divorced three years ago, said I'd get used to it and that it was actually kind of cool to have just Dad time. Having friends like Reesa who had gone through this stuff before me really helped me feel less alone about it.

"How about the House of Pasta?" I asked, rubbing my hands in front of the heater as we drove.

"The House of Pasta it is," my dad said.

Soon we were at a cozy table in my favorite restaurant, a basket of breadsticks in front of us. My dad asked all about school and Girls Club, and I tried to give good answers. But I couldn't stop thinking about the whole Secret Santa mess and how I'd let Jade down.

Finally, after my dad watched me push my ravioli around on my plate, he leaned forward, his brows crinkled together in concern. "What's wrong, Caitlin?" he asked.

I looked down at my plate. I could tell my dad stuff, and he'd really listen and try to help. But what if he was disappointed in me, too, like Jade? He was looking at me sympathetically, so I took a deep breath and told him the whole thing.

"That's a tough one," he said. "It sounds like you're going to need to find something for this girl Dana."

"Yeah," I said with a sigh. "But how do I figure out what to get her? It seems like she hates everything." I thought of her face when Ariana offered her the cupcake. If someone hated cupcakes, was there anything she liked?

"Want some advice from your old dad?" he asked.

I nodded.

"Everybody has reasons for what she does, and you may never know what Dana's are," he said, twining some spaghetti around his fork. "But watch her. See who she is in the moments when no one is looking. Get past that front she puts up for the world and see what she likes. Or better yet, what she needs."

I frowned. "That sounds really hard," I said.

"The important things in life often are," he said. "But remember, this Secret Santa activity, it's not about the gift," he said. "It's about the spirit of Christmas. And that means putting your heart into something and giving it your all."

He sounded a little like Jade.

"I guess I can try," I said.

My dad reached over and touched my cheek. "I know you can," he said.

On Saturday afternoon the Girls Club met up at the local shelter. It was a no-kill shelter with big cages for the animals, lots of toys, and room for the animals to run around. Lots of dogs and cats came over to us, eager for attention. I picked up a tennis ball to play fetch with a little black-and-white spotted dog. But mostly I kept an eye on Dana.

The first thing I saw was that she kept her distance from the club members playing with the animals, which I thought would mean she didn't do anything, but actually she did. She helped the shelter workers put fresh water in all the bowls, and when a delivery of cat food came, she went out and helped unload it and bring it inside.

I noticed her blowing on her fingers after that—they were red and probably freezing from the cold because she didn't have gloves.

And the last thing I noticed was that her jacket and her sweater were both purple.

So later that afternoon, after we'd finished at the shelter, I went to the knitting store in town and bought a soft skein of lavender yarn to make Dana a new pair of gloves.

It didn't seem like much, but it was the best I could come up with, and I put my heart into it, knitting designs on the fingers and making sure each stitch was tight, to keep out the icy winter winds. And by the time the Girls Club Christmas party rolled around, I was ready.

Tension knotted my stomach as Jade lowered the lights so that the room was lit by soft Christmas tree lights. Christmas carols played in the background as we sat in our circle, ready to share presents. Normally this moment felt magical to me, but today all I could think about was Dana's reaction to my gift. I'd really worked on the gloves, and if she made a face at them the way she had at Alexandra's cupcakes, it would be hard to hold back my tears.

Keisha went first, giving her gift to Reesa, who squealed gleefully when she saw what it was. Reesa loved taking pictures, so Keisha had gotten a beautiful leather photo album and decorated the cover with pictures from Girls Club.

We went around slowly as each girl opened the gift that was just right for her. And then it came time for Dana. She was sitting a little apart from the rest of us, her brow creased as always. She had not applauded at the other gifts, the way the rest of us had, and her face was disinterested as she tore open the package I'd wrapped with layers of silver and purple tissue paper. When she got to the gloves inside, she picked them up in one hand and the corners of her mouth turned down.

I braced myself, ready to hear a sharp comment about how they were the wrong color or wrong size. But Dana stayed silent. And then her eyes filled with tears.

The girls around her hushed, and Jade rushed

over with a box of tissues. "Are you OK?" Jade asked Dana.

Dana's eyes shone with tears, but then something happened that shocked me. Dana smiled. "Yes, it's just—these are perfect," she said, holding the gloves close. "Exactly what my mom would make me if she could." And then her eyes filled with tears again. "My mom is sick," she said. "And she can't take care of me and my brothers like she used to. She can't take us to birthday parties or make Christmas cookies, and my dad is so busy working, he can't do it either. They wanted me to come here so I could have some fun, but usually I'm so worried about my mom that I just can't think about anything else."

The girls on either side of Dana had moved in close. Ariana had an arm around her, and Keisha was patting her knee. And instead of pulling back like she usually did, Dana leaned against Ariana and smiled at Keisha. I suddenly remembered the day I told the club about my parents' divorce, the way everyone crowded around, letting me know I wasn't alone.

"I'm so glad you told us," Jade said. "Because I think there are a lot of ways we can help, aren't there, girls?"

Just as they helped me through the divorce.

We all nodded, and everyone started coming up with ideas. Across the sea of voices Dana met my eyes, lifted up the gloves, and whispered, "Thank you."

In that moment I finally got what Jade and my dad had been saying all along. It wasn't the gift that mattered. It was this—all of us together, being there for Dana. This was the true spirit of Christmas. ★

Meet the Author

About age 10 Now

Daphne Benedis-Grab

Christmas is my favorite holiday. I love decorating the tree, singing carols, and exchanging gifts on Christmas morning. But most of all, I love how holidays bring people together.

This or That?

Holiday Edition

Need a laugh? Answer these silly questions with a friend.

Would you rather...

decorate with twinkle lights all year long **OR** only one night a year?

go to school dressed as an elf **OR** a reindeer?

live in a gingerbread house **OR** an ice palace?

have a hot cocoa dispenser in your locker **OR** a cookie machine in your room?

drink peppermint milk **OR** peppermint soda?

compete in an ice-skating marathon **OR** synchronized snowboarding?

go sledding in ice cream **OR** in powdered sugar?

have a pet penguin who sings **OR** a pet polar bear who plays guitar?

wear a hat with a giant pom-pom **OR** a headband with giant animal ears?

be snowed in at a movie theater **OR** an indoor pool?

eat a candy cane that tastes like pine trees **OR** gum that tastes like eggnog?

have a sweater that lights up **OR** boots that play music?

share a huge gift with a sibling **OR** receive a small one just for you?

ride to school in a sleigh pulled by walruses **OR** foxes?

design wrapping paper **OR** window displays? ★

Illustrations: Genevieve Kote

Illustrations: Monika Roe

Mini Mag

With the Mini Mag, you can make a miniature copy of *American Girl* for your doll or stuffed animal. All you need are scissors and a stapler. Read the directions all the way through before you begin.

1. Cut out each pair of pages only on the dotted lines. Be sure to cut around the tabs marked with the letters A, B, C, and D.

2. Stack the pages on top of one another in the order shown below, with the letters on the tabs facing up.

Continued

A

Craft

Festive Flair

Use these paper decorations wherever you want holiday cheer—on a tree, a window, a gift, and more!

Gift Topper
Dress up a gift with paper ruffles!

1. Flatten 10 paper cupcake liners, and stack them on top of each other. Staple the stack together in the center.
2. Next, fold the stack in half and use scissors to cut slits all along the curved edge.
3. Unfold the liners and fluff them so that they don't stick together. Attach the topper to a gift using double-stick tape.

Confetti Tags
Create dotted gift tags from paper. Use a hole punch to cut tiny circles from colorful paper. Then cut a 2-by-3-inch piece of card stock or paper for the gift tag. Use a glue stick to attach the tiny circles to the gift tag. (Be sure to leave space at the top of the tag.) Let dry. Punch a hole near the top of the tag, and thread ribbon through the hole. Don't forget to write "To" and "From"!

28 American Girl

Around the World
At the top of every hour, short clips from that year's events flash on the screen.

Balloon Drop
Make the midnight cheer even more special with a balloon drop. Before the party, fill balloons with confetti. Tie a long piece of string to one balloon. Ask an adult to help you tape the balloon to the ceiling. When the clock strikes midnight, pull the string to release the balloon. Ask the adult to tape down the balloon to keep the fun going!

Dance a thon
Pick a playlist and turn on the music. Don't just pick a fast beat—a ballroom song is fun, too! Dancing is a great way to get your heart pumping. Have everyone dance for a set amount of time, and see who can dance the longest. Ask the adult to help you keep track of the time.

Confetti Treats
Add a little extra sparkle to your holiday treats. Use a cookie cutter to cut shapes from rolled cookies. Or, for a no-bake option, mix crushed candy canes into melted white chocolate. Spread the mixture on a cookie sheet, and let it harden. Break into pieces, and enjoy!

Happy new year!

B

The Secret Santa

When I started third grade, I made a new friend at school. But after a while, she tried to keep me away from my other friends. Sometimes she pinched me and pulled my hair. I thought she was my friend. But really, I never knew when she was going to try to hurt me. I was scared and didn't tell anyone.

My mom asked me if something was wrong. I didn't want to tell on my friend, but finally, I told my mom what was happening. We talked about it a lot. I could have switched schools. But I love my school. I didn't want to leave. Instead, I wanted to try to make things better—for myself and for other kids who get bullied.

My mom and I did a lot of research and shared what we learned about the dangers of bullying. We talked to school leaders. Then we raised enough money to have a speaker come in and give an anti-bullying presentation. Then my mom and I started an organization to spread awareness.

So far we've raised more than $42,000. Part of the money goes to educational tool kits that we give to schools. I've written articles and traveled around the country to speak at conferences. We also started a kindness council in our town. This summer, we're hosting a kindness camp. We're even working with the governor of Kentucky to create a statewide group to stop bullying.

None of this has been easy. Like, I get very nervous when I have to speak in public. But I just try to get courage. I have a voice, and I want to use it for good.

These days, things have been much better for me at school. But bullying still happens to millions of kids every year. Not long ago, one of my friends told me about others making fun of her. I suggested that she talk to a parent or a teacher and find new friends. It might be hard, but it's important to stand up for yourself. I don't ever want to be bullied again, and I don't want anyone else to be, either.

32 American Girl

C

This or That? Holiday Edition

Need a laugh? Answer these silly questions with a friend.

Would you rather...

- decorate with twinkle lights all year long OR only one night a year?
- go to school dressed as an elf OR a reindeer?
- live in a gingerbread house OR an ice palace?
- have a hot cocoa dispenser in your locker OR a cookie machine in your room?
- drink peppermint milk OR peppermint soda?
- compete in an ice-skating marathon OR synchronized snowboarding?
- go sledding in ice cleats OR in powdered sugar?
- have a pet penguin who sings OR a pet polar bear who plays guitar?
- wear a hat with a giant plastic gem OR a headband with giant animal ears?
- be snowed in at a movie theater OR an indoor pool?
- eat a candy cane that tastes like pine trees OR gum that tastes like eggnog?
- have a sweater that lights up OR boots that play music?
- share a huge gift with a sibling OR receive a small one just for you?
- ride to school in a sleigh pulled by reindeer OR skates?
- design wrapping paper OR window displays?

40

3. Your friend's ideal birthday probably would have a lot of
   - a. gifts.
   - b. guests.
   - c. birthday texts.

4. Your friend would never forget
   - a. a special gift from you.
   - b. a fun experience you shared.
   - c. a nice compliment you gave her.

5. Your friend's dream pet would be
   - a. a sweet hamster—she'd build him the ultimate hamster house and research the best treats.
   - b. an energetic dog—she'd run with her at the park and teach her all kinds of tricks.
   - c. a talking bird—she'd love a pet who could chat with her.

6. If your friend joined a club, it would probably be
   - a. Craft Club.
   - b. Adventure Club.
   - c. Writing Club.

7. A holiday activity your friend would like is
   - a. making cookies to share.
   - b. collecting donations for charity with friends.
   - c. singing or performing in a show.

8. Your friend's favorite T-shirt would
   - a. be a gift from someone else.
   - b. be from a fun run she participated in.
   - c. have her favorite saying on it.

9. When you need cheering up, your friend might
   - a. make you a gift.
   - b. invite you to do something fun together.
   - c. write you a kind note.

Gifts come in all shapes and sizes. Turn the page to discover your friend's favorite kind of present. Then read on for great gift ideas!

Illustrations: Sara Bengé

D

American Girl

Coming up in the January issue of *American Girl* magazine

Think Pink
Make a delicious Valentine's Day snack.

Out of this World
Gaze at new planets designed by readers like you.

Cool at School
Give your locker a new look.

Cute Castles
Discover which castle matches your personality.

For more fun and games, go to americangirl.com/playmagazine

Posters: CUTE Baby Animals! ★ Free Stickers and a Comic

American Girl

americangirlmagazine.com

3 funny quizzes

- How to find the perfect **present**
- **Pretty** paper crafts

Plus! Celebrate New Year's Eve with our fun party

Happy New Year!

Try these New Year's Eve ideas at a party with family or a sleepover with friends!

Night Lights
Light up the New Year! Give guests glow-in-the-dark bracelets and necklaces to wear (available at party supply stores), and decorate the room with glow-in-the-dark stars. Keep the lights on during the countdown and then turn them all off at midnight.

Party Hats
Party hats go with anything—from pj's to party clothes—so make your own! First, cover a table with a disposable tablecloth and set out craft supplies such as markers, stickers, googly eyes, and ribbon. Don't forget scissors and double-stick tape, too! Then let each guest decorate a paper party hat. Wear the hats until the New Year!

Sparkle Punch
Make a bubbling treat! Pour 3 cups cranberry juice, 2 cups orange juice, and 3 cups ginger ale in a pitcher. Stir gently with a spoon. Add fun cubes and pour into glasses.

Countdown Crunch
Bake 8 cups crunchy snack mix before your party begins. In a large bowl, mix together 6 cups of squares or wavy spoon cereal, 1 cup Cheerio crackers, 2 cups popped popcorn, and 1 cup pretzels. In a separate microwave-safe bowl, melt 4 tablespoons butter (about 30 seconds). Ask an adult to pour the melted butter over the cereal mixture and stir until the mixture is coated. Then add one 1-oz package peach pleasing mix and stir again until coated. Do not cook. Store the party mix in a covered container until it's time to serve it.

Starry Sight

Brighten a window with holiday stars.

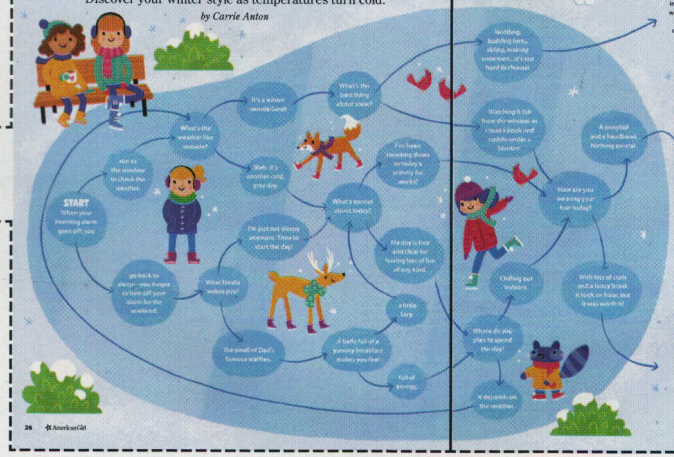
1. Start with a 6-by-6-inch piece of scrapbook paper. Make a crease by folding and unfolding the paper in half horizontally. Create another crease by folding and unfolding the paper in half vertically.
2. Fold and unfold the paper diagonally, and repeat to make a fourth crease. Lay the paper flat.
3. Turn the paper pattern-side down. Use scissors to cut a 1¼-inch slit at A, B, C, and D.
4. Fold in the flaps on both sides of each corner to make 4 points.
5. At each corner, fold one flap over the other and attach with tape or craft glue. Let dry. Make a second star.
6. Use craft glue to join two stars together. Let dry. Ask an adult to use a needle and thread to make a hole at the top of a point. Tie the string to make a loop for hanging.

Quiz

Fashion Forecast

Discover your winter style as temperatures turn cold.

by Carrie Anton

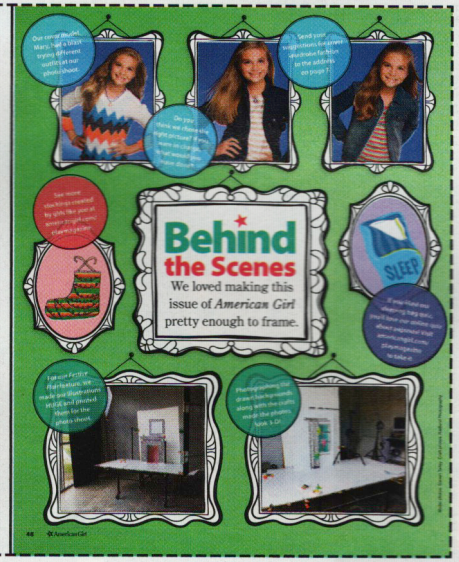


Gift Decoder

Gift giving got you stumped? Take this quiz to pick the perfect present for a friend.

1. Your friend's prized possession would be
   a. her bracelet collection.
   b. a souvenir from a fun vacation.
   c. a special note from a family member.

2. If you went on vacation, your friend would like it best if you
   a. brought her back a T-shirt.
   b. invited her along.
   c. sent her a funny postcard.



How can Caitlin get into the spirit of Christmas for a girl she doesn't even like?

by Daphne Benedis-Grab

"Ready, Caitlin?" my best friend, Keisha, asked. The last bell had rung, and the hall of our middle school was packed with kids in coats and snow boots heading out into the winter afternoon.

"Yeah," I said, slamming my locker shut. I wound the pink and gold scarf I'd knit around my neck as we made our way through the crowd and out into the cold.

"It's snowing again," Keisha said happily, linking her arm with mine. We were both wearing puffy down jackets, so it felt a little like linking arms with a marshmallow.

"Maybe we'll make maple sugar snow candy in Girls Club," I said as the flakes fell softly on my cheeks. The club met every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon, and while we always looked forward to it, today we were extra eager to get there.

"I bet we'll make some after the name draw," Keisha said. "I can't wait to see whose name I get this year."

"Me either," I said. Girls Club had members from all over town, and we did fun stuff like craft and cooking projects, volunteering at a local animal shelter, and just hanging out and talking. We also had special traditions for each holiday, like the haunted house we set up on Halloween and the egg hunt we did at Easter for all the little kids in town. But the very best was the Secret Santa we did at Christmas. That was when we all drew names out of a big Santa hat and then got a special gift that had to be twenty dollars or less, just for that person. You weren't allowed to tell who you picked until we had our big club Christmas party on December 23, which was two weeks away. Everyone at club got really into the Secret Santa, and we all tried to get gifts our pick would love. Like last year my friend Ariana got my name, and she gave me a bunch of yarn and a new set of knitting needles, which was totally perfect for me.

"Want to go gift shopping this weekend?" Keisha asked. We were on Main Street, and Christmas lights twinkled from the stores and restaurants lining the sidewalk. Wreaths hung on the lampposts, and vines of holly were wound around the telephone poles.

"Definitely," I said.

We'd reached the Town Hall, where Girls Club met in a conference room above the library. Keisha and I stomped our boots to get the snow off, and we then headed inside and up the creaky wooden staircase to the second floor. We hung our coats and backpacks on hooks outside and went in. Jade, the college student who leads the club, waved. Ariana and her twin sister, Alexandra, were at the snack table, and we headed over to them.

"Caitlin, I love your sweater," Ariana said, moving to the side so that we could get hot chocolate and graham crackers.

"Thanks," I said, grinning. "I used the yarn you got me."

Ariana laughed. "I thought I recognized that sunny yellow."

"Are you guys excited for the name draw?" Alexandra asked.

I was about to reply when I heard someone else

Mini Mag

3. Fold the stack of pages in half along the solid line in the center. The cover of the magazine should now be on top. Run your fingernail down the folded edge to help the pages lie flat.

4. Open the folded stack. Staple along the center line. Cut off the tabs, and you're done!

cuddle someone

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Posters Carefully cut along the dotted lines to remove your posters.

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HELP!

Dear *American Girl,*

My birthday is close to Christmas, so people bring me one gift for both, instead of two. I don't want to be greedy, but it's really unfair!

Unfair

People with birthdays around big holidays often come up short. How about planning a birthday party a month before or after Christmas? That way, you can have a day that celebrates *you* apart from the holiday hoopla. But remember: Gifts don't equal happiness. Being happy is about being grateful for what you *do* have, not what you don't.

Dear *American Girl,*

My school talent show is coming up, and I have a big problem: no talent. But I want to do the show!

I don't have a talent

Everyone has a talent! Maybe yours isn't singing or dancing, but what about reading a poem, doing jump-rope moves or card tricks, or showing the commands you've taught your dog? If you can't think of anything to do onstage, join the production crew. Design a show program, help run the lights, or set up seating for the audience. You can be super involved in the show even if you aren't in the spotlight.

★

Dear *American Girl,*

I have so much jewelry, but I'm not a jewelry girl. It's just sitting there—can I use it another way?

Jewels

If any jewelry is special or expensive, check your plans with a parent. But you can use your jewels in tons of unusual ways. Hang necklaces from your curtain rod. Use earrings as pushpins in your bulletin board. Stack bangle bracelets on an upright paper-towel holder for display, or use friendship bracelets as shoelaces, key chains, or straps on a cell phone or flash drive. You can *enjoy* everything even if you don't *wear* it.

★

Dear *American Girl,*

I am slow at everything I do. My family gets annoyed with me. It doesn't work if I try to speed up.

Slowpoke

Taking your time isn't a bad thing. But being mindful of other people's time is important also. Work to keep up with the group when possible (no dawdling on purpose!), but when you're being rushed, try saying, "Please, can I have a minute? I want to get this right." If you start having a really hard time making decisions, focusing in school, or reading directions, ask a parent, teacher, counselor, or doctor for advice.

★

Illustrations: Laura Cornell

MORE HELP!

Dear *American Girl,*

I've gotten straight A's my whole life. Whenever I get into the tiniest trouble, everybody is always so surprised because they think I'm "perfect." I'm tired of being thought of that way. How can I show people that they're wrong about me?

Not Perfect

It's hard to accept when people see you so differently than you see yourself. It's especially hard when people think you have it easy, that because you're "perfect" you don't have to work hard. You've enjoyed a lot of success, which is great, and now people have labeled you, which isn't so great. To bust out of this label, make sure that you are humble about your victories and you accept your defeats with grace. Keep doing what you're doing, and be gracious. "Thanks, I studied really hard" (for a good grade) or "Well, you can't win 'em all" (for a poor grade) acknowledges that what happens (or doesn't happen) isn't magic. It's just life.

★

Dear *American Girl,*

Ever since I was little, I have felt scared or shy around my cousin. The trouble is, he's NOT scary, and I don't know why I feel this way! I need to get over my fear of him because I'll see him soon.

Shy

If any relative ever does something that makes you feel scared, trust your instinct and talk to a parent. But it's normal to feel shy around relatives, especially ones you don't see often. Ask if you can e-mail, play an online game, or set up a video chat with your cousin before your next family gathering. That way, when you see him, he won't seem like a stranger, and you'll feel better.

★

Dear *American Girl,*

I've been saving for two years to buy a tablet. But my parents say there will be all these rules about it, like I can't have it until my homework is done, and I'll have to give it up at 8 p.m.! Is it even worth it?

restrictions

The bad news: Being a kid means you have to follow a bunch of rules. The worse news: You probably will dislike some of those rules—a lot. The good news: If your parents are letting you buy this tablet, you must have a good relationship with them. Let them know that you understand the rules, and ask what you can do to get them relaxed over time. Really listen to what they say, and then follow through. Good luck!

★

even MORE HELP!

Dear *American Girl*,

A friend is always wanting advice for her personal problems. I always say no because I don't want to get messed up in other people's matters. How do I say that in a kind way and get her to stop asking?

no help

It's wise of you to not want to get tangled up in others' problems. But part of being a friend is being supportive. When a friend says, "What should I do?" you could say, "What are your choices?" Ask her to list the pluses and minuses of each. When a person has someone listening while she talks, she often can work out the answer herself.

★

Dear *American Girl*,

I'm a picky eater, and my parents sometimes make food that I really don't like. I know they're not doing it to make me mad or anything, but still, yuck.

help

Trying new foods (and learning to like them) isn't always easy, but a good start is to begin pitching in with dinner. Help your parents pick out recipes and go food shopping. Then ask for help learning to prepare different dishes. Usually, when you help fix the food, you can have more of a say in what's served. That way, your parents get some help from you, and you get meals you enjoy more. Everyone wins!

★

Dear *American Girl*,

My parents tell me I'm too young to have crushes and stuff like that. But I can't help my emotions! Who's right—me or them?

crush

You are absolutely right in saying that you own your own mind and are going to feel how you feel—no one else controls that. But what your parents probably mean is that they think you're too young to be "going out" with someone. (They probably also are thinking, *How can our tiny baby be growing up so fast?!*) Now's probably a good time to talk to your parents about what their rules might be. And it's a really good idea to keep having talks with them. The more you can communicate calmly about this kind of thing, the happier your home will be, guaranteed.

★

Advice from You

"When you're having a tough day, take a break to clear your mind. You'll feel better if you make time to take a walk, listen to music, or make a craft."

Isabelle B.

Age 12, Vermont

Need advice? Got advice? Write:

Help!

***American Girl* magazine**

8400 Fairway Place

Middleton, WI 53562

Our cover model, Mary, had a blast trying different outfits at our photo shoot.

Do you think we chose the right picture? If you were in charge, what would you have done?

Send your suggestions for cover wardrobe fashion to the address on page 7.

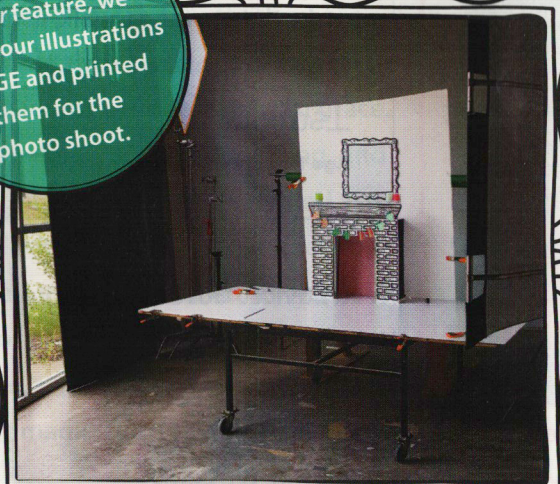
Behind the Scenes

We loved making this issue of *American Girl* pretty enough to frame.

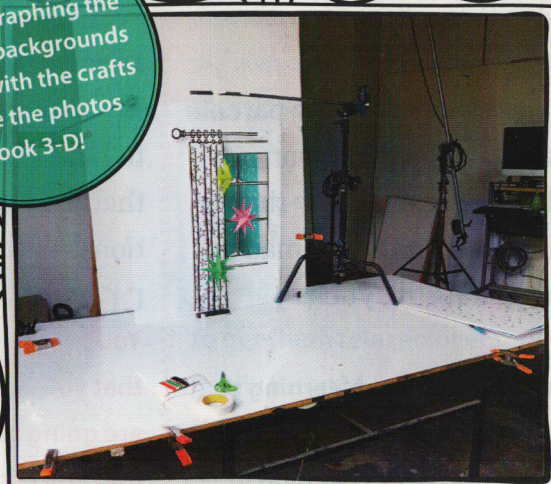
See more stockings created by girls like you at americangirl.com/playmagazine.

If you liked our sleeping bag quiz, you'll love our online quiz about pajamas! Visit americangirl.com/playmagazine to take it.

For our *Festive Flair* feature, we made our illustrations HUGE and printed them for the photo shoot.



Photographing the drawn backgrounds along with the crafts made the photos look 3-D!



Model photos: Steven Talley Craft photos: Radlund Photography

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Turn the page!

Passion for fashion

American Girl was the star of Project Runway in Septemb
These girls share what it's like to be a model for a television

Eight lucky girls rocked it on Project Runway!

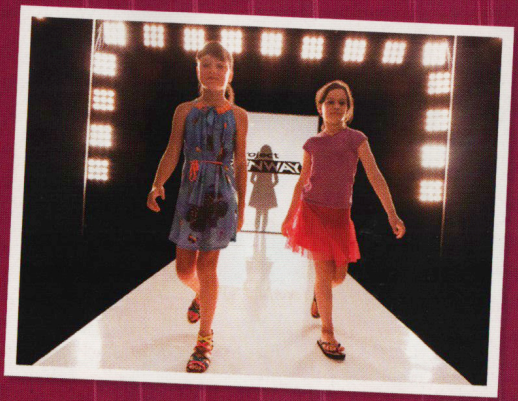
Designers created looks inspired by the American Girl BeForever characters.

I walked down the runway I usually see on a screen.

—Jessica C., age 9 (Caroline)

It was cool meeting my designer and seeing how a television show is made.

—Katie C., age 11 (Julie)



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project RUNWAY

My designer is taking my measurements as I am telling him the story of my doll, Samantha.

—Anita L., age 10 (Samantha)

This design inspired by Samantha Parkington won the challenge!

I had such an unbelievable experience doing the American Girl Project Runway show. It was a dream come true!

—Emma S., age 10 (Kit)

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American Girl

Coming up in the January issue of *American Girl* magazine

Think Pink
Make a delicious Valentine's Day snack.

Out of this World
Gaze at new planets designed by readers like you.

Cool at School
Give your locker a new look.

Cute Castles
Discover which castle matches your personality.

Illustrations: Carol Yoshizumi

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AG's New Year Cheer Stickers

Celebrate and decorate 2015 with our festive stickers.

Illustrations: Carol Yoshizumi

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